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SUBJECT Vitaly Yurchenko

TOM BROKAW: A big-time Soviet defector decides to go back to Russia. And the big question tonight is, why?

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BROKAW: There's a spy story in Washington tonight so bizarre, so full of intrigue and questions, we may never know exactly what is going on. This man, Vitaly Yurchenko, was identified as the fifth-ranking official of the Soviet KGB -- that's the secret police -- when he defected to the West last summer. He was called at the time the highest-ranking Russian intelligence officer to come over. He's been in custody of the CIA since August and he's been credited with supplying information about Americans who were spying for the Soviets, including a CIA employee who subsequently fled the United States.

Then tonight a big surprise. Yurchenko turned up at the Russian Embassy, claiming that he had been kidnapped and drugged.

NBC's John Dancy is standing by outside the Soviet Embassy now with more.

JOHN DANCY: Tom, a full-scale American-style news conference has been going on here at the Soviet Embassy.

The United States has claimed all along that Yurchenko was a walk-in, a volunteer. But Yurchenko tells a far different story.

Yurchenko, who wears a flowing mustache, said he was kidnapped and drugged by the CIA in Rome and brought to a CIA safehouse outside Washington. There, he claimed, he was

questioned under the influence of drugs about Soviet penetration of the CIA.

TRANSLATOR: In the period when I was conscious and controlled my behavior, I'd have not passed any secret information. When I was not drugged, they were telling me that I came to them, came to the Americans myself, on my own will, on my own accord. I did not believe them. I was convinced that they were deceiving me.

When I was under -- when I was drugged, with the use of some special drugs, I don't know what I was saying or what I was doing.

The thing which I want to mention outright is that I was threatened.

DANCY: Yurchenko claimed he was tortured by the CIA. He said he was kept in isolation, with no word of his wife and son back home.

VITALY YURCHENKO: When I was sleeping, they prohibited even to close the door. The door should be closed, and next room was sitting such fat, quite stupid --- excuse me -- non-emotional person who is following the order, only following the orders. It seems to me specially -- sometimes I thought that I was among crazy persons.

DANCY: On Capitol Hill, senators familiar with the case flatly denied Yurchenko's charges.

SENATOR DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN: He came to us. We did not drug him. We did not force him. We in no way coerced him into his original decision.

SENATOR DAVID DURENBERGER: Either this was a setup from the beginning just to make us look bad -- not give us bad information, but just to make us look bad -- or the guy really is under some substantial duress and thinks that, somehow, he's feathering a nest in Siberia for himself.

DANCY: Tom, whatever the story, we will finally know once Yurchenko is ready to tell his full story. But there's an awful lot of mystery about this. Yurchenko says that he was offered a million dollars by the CIA, plus \$62,000 a year. Certainly the United States is going to want to question him again.

BROKAW: Thanks very much, John Dancy tonight.

And with us now in our Washington studio is William

Colby, former Director of the CIA.

Mr. Colby, what about that business that he wanted to make us look bad? The summit now is two weeks away. He has a tale of drugging and kidnapping. And human rights, of course, is going to be a big issue there. Are the Russians going to point their finger at us and say, "Well, see. This is what you do when you come to the international scene"?

WILLIAM COLBY: Well, I think they had this affair for their own purposes, internal purposes, to discourage other people from defecting. But the interesting aspect of that was that Mr. Yurchenko himself attempted to excuse the President by saying the President wouldn't necessarily have known anything about it. Now, that's a key symbol that they don't want to mess up the summit, it seems to me.

BROKAW: He was questioned very intensely. We know that.

COLBY: Obviously.

BROKAW: What could he have learned from the questions themselves?

COLBY: I don't think very much from the questions. The questions would have been obvious: what agents they had in our society, how they follow us around and try to get in touch with us, and all the rest of it, what their targets are. That wouldn't be telling them anything of importance to them about ourselves.

BROKAW: How do we treat defectors? Do we welcome them with open arms and offer them a million dollars and an annual salary?

COLBY: No. We treat them as defectors. We first want to interrogate them fairly intensely to see whether they're telling us the truth. And we do a lot of cross-checking as to whether that works out or not.

In some cases, when they are very valuable to them -- to us, yes, we offer them a future, a safe future in some new -- perhaps even a new name, a new identity, and support over the coming years, if what they give us is very valuable.

BROKAW: Thanks very much, Bill Colby, in our Washington studios tonight.